The Principles of Progressive Christianity.

BY EDWARD MASON.

As a brotherhood we all endorse the motto at the head of this paper, "Let us go on unto perfection." We look upon it as the watchword and battle-cry of the church. It really embraces the principles of progressive Christianity.

Progression is the grandest word in the English language, and when we couple it with Christianity, its meaning becomes still more elevated. Progression is the enemy to indolence, exclusiveness, formalism, and old-fogyism.

Christianity is simply the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ carried out and put into practice. On this all Christian denominations agree. Through the peculiar disposition of the human heart, Christianity has often dwindled into a profession more than a life. It is often in reality considered more as an assent of the mind than as an assent of the heart and life.

The object of the Lord's life and teaching is plainly told by the angel that appeared unto Joseph: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus [Savior]." Why? "For he shall save his people from their sins." Modern theology has surrounded the life and teachings of Christ with complications and mysteries that the Gospel does not teach or sanction. We hear a great deal about "original sin." If we look around and within us we will find that we have enough of actual sin to contend with and overcome, without bothering ourselves about the "original sin." If we act sensibly, we will allow the Lord to take care of the "original sin," and devote our time to the practical question of fighting present sin. The angel said, "He shall save his people from THEIR sin." That is the simplest explanation of our Lord's object and lifework. The more we read and study the life of Christ, the more we are convinced his object was to elevate mankind, to lift up fallen humanity, and to turn man from sinfulness to righteousness—which simply means right-living. So, in one sense, at least, he becomes our Savior. This reason is given by the angel above spoken. No grander salvation can be conceived than to elevate man and redeem him from sin.

Who can read the Sermon on the Mount and not be impressed with this thought. The whole plan of the Gospel seems to be centred upon the attainment of spiritual fruit. The possession or manifestation of this fruit is ever to be the distinctive feature of the Christian. "Wherefore by their fruits shall ye know them." Then again, "Herein is my father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples." In Gal. 5: 22, we are told what this fruit is: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, etc."

Then for the development and growth of this fruit, the Lord has instituted what we call the ordinances of the Lord's house.

Spiritual fruit, like the fruit of the earth, must be cultivated, and means used to bring about their development. We call the means provided by the Lord for the growth of good in the soul, the "means of grace."

In a late article on "Trees," it was stated that this was a great age of fertilizing. All good and prosperous farmers fertilized their crops that they might yield more abundantly. So the Lord has provided us with a spiritual fertilizer that we may grow in grace and good works. Let us notice what they are, and a brief explanation as to their object.

BAPTISM is the Lord's sign by which we manifest our sincerity in becoming a follower of the Lord. It is an earnest of our childlike obedience to the will of the Master. It symbolizes the cleansing of the soul from sin. It is the beginning of a new life and therefore called the "washing of regeneration." By it we consecrate and dedicate ourselves to the service of the Lord. It is a grand exercise of our faith. Our faith being strong in the Lord we are induced to put forth every effort in the great work of doing good.

PRAYER and PUBLIC WORSHIP are exercises of faith and devotion. It is in this service where the Lord has promised to meet us, and by contact with him we imbibe his Spirit, and thus are better qualified to do his work in benefiting mankind, and overcome the sinful desires of a carnal heart.

THE LORD'S SUPPER is a type of the eternal reunion that will be enjoyed by the children of God. It is calculated to cheer us with the bright anticipations of eternal bliss. Hope needs to be cultivated. For amidst the mist and the gloom we look beyond into the great future. Amidst the disappointments of life we need hope.

THE COMMUNION. The partaking of the emblems of the body and blood of our Lord brings to our remembrance the great sacrifice of the Savior of the World. The remembrance will arouse and strengthen our faith. Faith will awaken gratitude. Sterling gratitude will cause us to do that which is pleasing in the Lord's sight.

In FEET WASHING we commemorate the Lord's humility, and it is intended to teach us the lesson that true gospel greatness consists of being humble; and that we owe one another a service. It is calculated to draw us closer together, quickening our love for one another.

These institutions when observed in simple faith and earnestness accomplish the end for which they were ordained. Our hope and faith and love are developed so that we become more useful in the great work of the church.

The Lord we are told "went about doing good." and every page of the Gospel tells of the love he manifested for man. He left a legacy to his disciples of all ages—to carry on the work he had commenced—the work of saving the world from sin.

To be successful we must follow in his footsteps. The code of Christian ethics he left for us will lead all souls from the darkness of sin into the light of righteousness. If we are endowed with his spirit we will walk after his leading. We have already said, the Lord desires his people to bear the fruit of righteousness. This is the end of Christianity. We see this wherever we turn.

It is not the mere mechanical performance of these ordinances that will do us good. They do us good in proportion as they wean us from sin and cause us to do good to others. *We must not mistake the fertilizer for the fruit.* This I am afraid is sometimes the case. It is the fruit that the Lord is after. It is by the fruit and not the fertilizer that we should be judged.

The empty professor that boasted he had prophesied in the Lord's name, and in his name had done many wonderful things was denounced. Matt. 7: 21, 23. Yet the cup of cold water given only in the name of a disciple, we are assured shall not go unrewarded.

This Christianity is progressive. Peter tells us to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and so on to charity or love. Paul tells us that "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Without this charity all is useless, empty and of no avail.

The attainment of this love should be the life ambition of all disciples. We are assured by the Lord himself it is to be the distinguishing mark of discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples." By what? The literal performance of these ordinances? Our assent to a certain creed or opinion? No, but "if ye have love for one another." Love is the great test. We are sure that the Lord's fertilizer is good to develop this love. The mere performance of these ordinances may be of no avail, because the essence is lacking. The essence must enter into the soul to nourish and feed it.

Fruit, more fruit, brethren, that is the object of Christianity. Let us not forget to preach up these beautiful institutions, not for their mere performance, but that they may develop love.

If we go to hating or abusing those who do not observe or fertilize as we do, where is the fruit? If we become so vehement in our advocacy of these doctrines that we forget love, where is the progressive Christianity? Where is the fruit?

If we expect others to appreciate and endorse the Lord's fertilizer, let the effect of it be seen in our own souls, by the bearing of much fruit. The world wants to see it. The fertilizer in itself is useless only as it is the means of bringing forth fruit.

This is the principle of Progressive Christianity. Let us go on unto perfection. If those who are looking on see that those of us, who boast of using the Lord's fertilizer, do not produce a better quality of fruit, where is the recommendation of its merit on our part? The Lord's recommendation is there but ours is lacking. This is one reason why so many are not willing to accept the Lord's plan. "Let your light [or lite] so shine before men."

Condemning other people is not a good sign of greater purity in ourselves. It is not progressive Christianity. There was a time in our Lord's life, when the disciples found one doing good that did not follow them. They complained. The Lord said, "Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me." Then mark what follows. What a reproach to much of the unkindness and lack of charity that is manifested by those who boast of greater righteousness! "For he that is not against us is on our part."

In Christ's teaching there appears on the scene two Samaritants. One to show men how to perform sacrifices acceptable to God, and one to show how to acknowledge benefits received. In each case the emphasis is laid by the Lord on the fact that the man who had the right religion belonged to the wrong church, and held erroneous dogmas, and yet the Lord spoke a good word for them *and received them.*

Let all our teaching be to this end—to benefit mankind, for that is love. Let us go on unto perfection. Let us not neglect the fertilizing of the soul; neither let us mistake the fertilizer for the fruit.

The Sort of Man Who is Always Needed.

There is always need in the church for the man who will go ahead. He must be a breaker-up of the way, a pioneer, energetic and hopeful. People, even those who wish work done and are willing to do it, need leading—some one to go before and direct those who will follow. They can not lead; they can barely tell, perhaps, what they wish, but they know the value of having the work of the Lord going on, and are capable of telling it when once it is brought to their notice. The headman, therefore—the "foreman," as he is properly called—is always in demand, and if one can prove himself to be such, he may feel that his is a very necessary, as well as honorable, position. He must be a willing man; no other can be successful. He must also be earnest, having a heart in his work; patient, willing to be disappointed, if need be, and recover and wait; cheerful, optimistically looking forward to the achievement he desires; industrious, working himself, and seeking to get all others to work; able to endure all things, for he will be mercilessly blamed and rebuked, devout, amiable; forgiving, and generous. "True leaders are few," of course, when it requires so much to make one. —*United Presbyterian.*

Steadfastness In Truth.

Little boats always totter about on the surface of the water, going all ways, as it happens, and overturning in a breath: while the great ship sinks deeply and goes steadily on. The cause of its steadiness is its depth. So abiding in the great truths of God gives steadfastness of motion to the soul. Under all the pressure of error and unbelief and false doctrines, it is unmovable, abounding in the work of the Lord. It is not "tossed to and fro, and carried about, with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive," Eph. 4: 14.

It is a great thing to take the truth, and hold to it. It is a great thing to know error and not be misled by it. Holding on to the fundamentals of truth and seeking God's help, the soul is sure to come into the light. Everything by turns and nothing long, what growth, what progress can be hoped for? —Goodell.

Sorrow is not an accident, occurring now and and then—it is the very woof which is woven into into the warp of life, and he who has not discerned the Divine sacredness of sorrow, and the profound meaning which is concealed in pain, has yet to learn what life is. The cross, manifested as the necessity of the highest life, alone interprets it.—*F. W. Robertson.*